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# THE EFFECTS OF TEACHING SPELLING SKILLS USING WORD-LEVEL INFORMATION AND MNEMONIC STRATEGIES ON THE LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT OF YEAR 1, 2 AND 3 STUDENTS.

by

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## Abstract

Spelling instruction in New Zealand schools frequently focuses on children learning isolated lists of words, which are generally taken from either errors in their personal writing, or from core vocabulary lists (Brann & Hattie, 1995). This technique does not appear to be sufficient for developing good spelling skills in all children.

In order to understand the spelling difficulties experienced by older poor spellers (years 5 to 8), an initial exploratory study was carried out to examine the nature of spelling errors made by students of this age. A remedial programme was then designed to meet the identified needs of twenty poor spellers from this group of students. The results from a pilot of this programme showed improvements in the spelling performance of participating students. These studies are discussed as preliminary studies in this thesis.

The difficulties experienced by older poor spellers related to some or all of the following: poor letter-sound knowledge, lack of awareness of common spelling patterns, inability to use analogy of sounds and spelling patterns to generalise knowledge from word to word and lack of knowledge of basic rules and

conventions underlying written English. Normally developing spellers begin to use these sources of knowledge from year 1, as they develop reading and spelling skills. These sources of word-level information are seldom taught explicitly in New Zealand schools. Children are expected to "pick them up" through exposure to print. For the children who do not, spelling skills are seriously impaired.

A spelling programme, designed to teach this word-level information from school entry, was developed using the "Letterland" resource, which uses picture mnemonics and story (metaphor) to make information memorable. This programme, designed for year 1, 2 and 3 students, is evaluated in this thesis, by comparing the performance of children exposed to the programme from the training school, with that of students from a comparison school. The schools were matched by their socio-economic decile rating and by the results of their 6 year Observational Surveys, over a three-year period. Measures of performance with phonological awareness, spelling and reading were compared between these two schools.

Students from the training school achieved significantly better results in a number of areas including; letter-sound knowledge (years 1, 2, and 3), sound-letter

knowledge (years 1,2), phonological awareness (years 1, 2), pseudoword spelling (years 2,3), pseudoword reading (years 2,3), and proofreading (year 3). The percentage of students achieving scores in the lowest ranges was smaller in the training school for all year groups.

Since the introduction of this spelling programme to the training school, there have been significant improvements in the results of the 6 Year Observational Surveys in the areas of letter identification, writing vocabulary, dictation, and Burt word recognition and improvements in reading levels almost reached statistical significance. There were fewer children reading in the lowest levels (0-5), a greater number reading at or above levels 12-14 and an increase in the number of children reading in the top levels (i.e., level 19 and above).

Teaching word-level information explicitly, using strategies which made learning memorable, improved the phonological awareness, spelling and reading skills of the children exposed to this spelling programme.

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